

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14 USIA-12

OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-20 IO-12 GAC-01 RSR-01 /115 W

----- 062832

R 300401 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7061

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1950

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNMENTAL
CHANGES -- SUMMING UP

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRESIDENT PARK HAS OVERHAULED THE ROK
POLITICAL SYSTEM TO STRENGTHEN HIS PERSONAL CONTROL OVER
THE GOVT AND THE GOVT' S CONTROL OVER THE POPULATION. BY
CAREFUL PLANNING, SKILLFUL EXECUTION, AND A SUITABLE
DISPLAY OF FORCE, HE WROUGHT THE CHANGES WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT
CHALLENGE OR ORGANIZED RESISTANCE DESPITE CONSIDERABLE
OPPOSITION SENTIMENT AND A HISTORY OF POLITICAL PROTEST.
THE PUBLIC ATTITUDE IS ONE OF ACCEPTANCE, WITH A SENSE OF
RESIGNATION AMONG THOSE WHO DISAPPROVE. WE PRESENTLY SEE
LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE NEW SYSTEM WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY
CHALLENGED OR MODIFIED WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO. WE
EXPECT HARMONY AND CONSENSUS UNDER STRONG PERSONAL REULE
TO BE THE HALLMARK OF THE NEW ERA. END SUMMARY

1. WITH THE ELECTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS
ORGANIZATION, PRESIDENT PARK' S MAJOR TRANSFORMATION OF THE
INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN COMPLETED. IN JUST
UNDER FIVE MONTHS, HIS ADMINISTRATION HAS SMOOTHLY AND
EFFICIENTLY MOVED THROUGH THE SUCCESSIVE STEPS OF ITS
METICULOUSLY PLANNED COURSE FOR THE PROCESS OF CHANGE --
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SETTING ASIDE THE OLD CONSTITUTION AND PRESENTING A NEW ONE;
SECURING PUBLIC APPROVAL OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION IN A

NATIONAL REFERENDUM; ELECTING A NATIONAL UNIFICATION COUNCIL; RE- ELECTING PRESIDENT PARK TO A SIX- YEAR TERM; AND ELECTING A NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY -- WITHAL CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THESE CANGES ARE NOW ACCEPTED WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE OR RESISTANCE DESPITE OPPOSITION IN MANY SECTORS OF THE KOREAN PUBLIC.

2. CONSIDERING THE VOLATILITY OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE WHO HAVE RISEN IN POLITICAL PROTEST SEVERAL TIMES OVER LESSER ISSUES IN THE PAST, HOW WERE THESE CHANGES ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT ANY OUTBREAK OF ACTIVE OPPOSITION OR ORGANIZED PROTEST? THE ANSWER IS -- BY CAREFUL PLANNING, BY NEUTRALIZATION OF ALL MAJOR ELEMENTS OF POTENTIAL OPPOSITION, BY CAREFUL USE AND DISPLAY OF SHEER POWER, AND BY A SKILLFUL EXPLOITATION OF A CULTURAL TRAIT WHICH LEADS KOREANS TO EXPECT AND UNDERSTAND THE EXERCISE OF STRONG CENTRAL AUTHORITY EVEN IF THEY DON' T LIKE IT. THE DECEMBER 1971 EMERGENCY POWERS TAKEN BY THE PRESIDENT HAD A POWERFUL CONDITIONING EFFECT, PARTICULARLY ON THE PRESS. BEYOND THAT, PARK EMPLOYED A CAREFUL BLEND OF MONEY AND FAVOR ON THE ONE HAND, AND ON THE OTHER FORCE, INTIMIDATION AND A FEW CASES OF ILL- CONCEALED BRUTALITY TO NEUTRALIZE ALL ELEMENTS OF POTENTIAL OPPOSITION -- THE PRESS THROUGH CONTROLS AND INTIMIDATION, STUDENTS THROUGH DISPLAY OF POWER AND INTIMIDATION, INTELLECTUALS AND OPPOSITION POLITICIANS THROUGH SELECTIVE APPLICATION OF BOTH INTIMIDATION AND FAVOR. THUS, THOUGH UNPROVABLE, IT IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD AMONG KOREANS THAT THE PRESENT LEADER OF THE PRINCIPAL OPPOSITION PARTY (NDP), YU CHIN- SAN, AS WELL AS OTHERS ACCEPT HANDSOME PAYOFFS IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER TO ASSURE A " COOPERATIVE" OPPOSITION. IN A TYPICALLY SOPHISTICATED WAY, SUCH COOPERATION IS MADE AN ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO SELF- IMPOSED EXILE AS IN THE CASE OF KIM TAE- CHUNG OR TO PERSECUTION OF THE KIND EXPERIENCE BY SUCH VIGOROUS AND UNCOMPROMISING OPPOSITIONISTS AS CHO YUN- HYONG, YI SE- KYU AND NA SOK- HO. THESE ARE AMONG THE OPPOSITIONISTS WHO HAVE EITHER BEEN PROSECUTED IN THE COURTS OR HAVE SIGNED UNDER DURESS, WHILE IN DETENTION, WRITTEN PLEDGES NOT TO E GAGE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY.

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4. COMPLETE CENTRALIZATION, IN PLACE OF A PARTIAL DIVISION OF POWERS, AND STRENGTHENED SUPREMACY OF THE STATE OVER INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS ARE THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NEW ROK POSITICAL SYSTEM AND ITS PREDECESSOR. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT' S POWER WAS SUPREME UNDER THE PREVIOUS CONSTITUTION, THE NEED TO GIVE LIP SERVICE TO A DIVISION OF POWERS GAVE THE COURTS AND LEGISLATURE A LIMITED DEGREE OF AUTONOMY. POLITICAL PARTIES, MASS MEDIA, UNIVERSITIES AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, ALTHOUGH CLOSELY WATCHED AND INHIBITED,

POSSESSED A MODICUM OF INDEPENDENCE ASSURED BY THE CONSTITUTION. UNDER THE "REVITALIZATION CONSTITUTION," IN CONTRAST, ALL BRANCHES OF GOVT ARE SUBORDINATE TO THE PRESIDENT AND ALL INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS ARE SUBJECT TO RESTRICTION. THE PRESIDENT'S POWERS ARE LIMITED BY PUBLIC TOLERANCE, NOT BY LAW. WITHIN THAT LIMITATION HIS TENURE IN OFFICE IS ASSURED FOR AS LONG AS HE IS ABLE AND WILLING TO RULE.

5. WITH ALL SOURCES OF POTENTIAL OPPOSITION NEUTRALIZED, TEMPORARILY IF NOT PERMANENTLY, THE SITUATION TODAY IS ONE OF QUIET, GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OF PRESIDENT PARK'S RULE AND THE NEW CONSTITUTION. THERE IS FRAGMENTED, INDIVIDUAL OPPOSITION, USUALLY RESIGNED TO THE EXISTING SITUATION, BUT NO ORGANIZED CHALLENGE OR RESISTANCE. CONTINUED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PARK'S ATTACK ON THE UNIFICATION ISSUE THROUGH THE SOUTH-NORTH DIALOGUE ARE IMPORTANT SUPPLEMENTARY ELEMENTS IN MAKING THE CHANGES ACCEPTABLE TO THE KOREAN PUBLIC. OVERALL, MOREOVER, PARK'S ABILITY TO DATE TO USE HIS STRONG POWER BASE IN THE MILITARY AND GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES REMAINS FUNDAMENTAL TO HIS RULE.

THE ATTENTION HE PAYS TO THIS IS ONCE AGAIN PROVEN IN THE YUN PIL-YONG CASE.

6. OVER A PERIOD OF TIME THE PARK ADMINISTRATION MAY MAKE MISTAKES. CONCEIVABLY ALSO THE OPPOSITION, AFTER ADJUSTMENT TO THE NEW SITUATION, MAY FIND A WAY TO ORGANIZE AGAINST IT AND COALESCE AROUND NEW ISSUES OR NEW LEADERS. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT IN TIME PRESIDENT PARK, WHO HAS SHOWN A SOPHISTICATION AND SKILL IN POLITICAL MANAGEMENT, MAY GRADUALLY ADJUST THE SYSTEM IN ACCOMMODATION TO POPULAR PREFERENCE AND PUBLIC PRESSURE FROM MORE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS.

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FOR THE PRESENT, HOWEVER, AND FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO, WE SEE NO LIKELIHOOD OF EITHER SIGNIFICANT CHANGE OR SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE PRESENT SYSTEM OR TO PRESIDENT PARK'S CONTINUED RULE. THE OBJECTIVE AND THE HALLMARK OF THIS ERA WILL BE HARMONY AND CONSENSUS -- OLD KOREAN VIRTUES -- RATHER THAN CONTENTION AND CHALLENGE, AND ON PRESENT EVIDENCE WE FORESEE A GREATER LIKELIHOOD OF ADAPTATION BY THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL LIFE IN THE COUNTRY TO THIS PATTERN OF GOVERNMENT THAN OF RESISTANCE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 07 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 MAR 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973SEOUL01950
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: SEOUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730348/abqcehzv.tel
Line Count: 160
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 NOV 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05-Nov-2001 by willialc>; APPROVED <21-Nov-2001 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> srp 980115
Subject: THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNMENTAL CHANGES -- SUMMING UP
TAGS: PINT, KS
To: STATE
TOKYO
CINCPAC
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005